

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
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O 222132Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8362

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7143

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E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MOPS, MILI, LE, IS, US, PLO
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON

REF: STATE 227802

1. I SAW WEIZMAN AT 2030 HOURS TONIGHT AT HIS RESIDENCE AND CONVEYED INSTRUCTIONS REFTEL. DATT AND MAJOR GEN. GAZIT WERE ALSO PRESENT. (FYI: FOR REASONS I HAVE YET TO DISCOVER, REFTEL WAS NOT DELIVERED TO ME UNTIL 1955 HOURS LOCAL.)
2. WEIZMAN ASKED THAT I INFORM THE DEPARTMENT HE HAD TELEPHONED PRIME MINISTER BEGIN THAT HE WAS MEETING WITH ME TONIGHT, AND THAT HE HAD REQUESTED A MEETING OF THE CABINET DEFENSE COMMITTEE BE HELD AT 0930 HOURS TOMORROW MORNING (SEPT 23) TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION IN LIGHT OF MY MESSAGE. HE SAID DINITZ HAD TELEPHONED HIM AT 1500 HOURS THIS AFTERNOON AND AS A RESULT OF THAT CONVERSATION HE THOUGHT HE HAD A FAIRLY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT I WAS ABOUT TO TELL HIM.
3. I THEN WENT THROUGH YOUR INSTRUCTIONS WITH HIM LINE BY LINE SO THAT THERE COULD BE NO MIS-READING OF THE IMPORT OF OUR POSITION. WEIZMAN REPLIED THE FIRST THING WE SHOULD ALL UNDERSTAND WAS HIS GREAT CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF THE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN TEL SHARIFA. HE SAID A WRONG

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MOVE BY THE ISRAELIS AND HADDAD'S MEN COULD ALL BE MASSACRED. THEIR LIVES WERE VERY MUCH ON HIS CONSCIENCE. HE CONTESTED YOUR ASSERTION THAT THE IDF COULD RESPOND EFFECTIVELY WITHIN MINUTES FROM THE ISRAELI SIDE OF THE BORDER. HE POINTED OUT THAT TEL SHARIFA WAS APPROXIMATELY 8 MILES FROM THE BORDER, WHEREAS ISRAELI FORCES (WHICH ARE NOW IN MARJAYOUN) ARE ONLY A COUPLE OF KILOMETERS DISTANT

FROM THE BATTLE AREA. THEIR CLOSE PRESENCE SERVED AS A "BIG MORALE FACTOR" IN SUPPORT OF THE 30 CHRISTIAN MILITIA HOLDING TEL SHARIFA WHO, HE SAID, COULD BE WIPED OUT IN A PALESTINIAN COUNTER-ATTACK BEFORE ISRAELI FORCES COULD REACT FROM ACROSS THE BORDER. WEIZMAN CATEGORICALLY DENIED THERE HAD BEEN ANY REINFORCEMENT OF ISRAELI FORCES INSIDE LEBANON.

4. WEIZMAN THEN BEGAN "TO THINK OUT LOUD," AS HE PUT IT, ABOUT HOW THE SITUATION COULD BE RESOLVED. HE ASKED, "COULD WE WORK OUT A SYSTEM WHEREBY A CEASEFIRE WILL START AT A SPECIFIED HOUR AND THE IDF WILL COMMENCE WITHDRAWAL AT THE SAME TIME." I REPLIED THAT I VERY MUCH DOUBTED THE LEBANESE WOULD BUY THIS. I SAID IT WAS MY PERSONAL JUDGEMENT THERE WAS NO HOPE FOR A CEASEFIRE UNTIL THE ISRAELIS HAD WITHDRAWN ALL THEIR FORCES ACROSS THE BORDER.

5. GENERAL GAZIT THEN SUGGESTED WHAT HE TERMED A "FACE-SAVING" CONCEPT INVOLVING TWO PHASES. PHASE ONE WOULD BE A DECLARED STANDSTILL AT AN AGREED-UPON HOUR DURING WHICH THE PARTIES COULD FIRE (IF THEY SO WISHED OR NEEDED) BUT THERE COULD BE NO ADVANCES OF FORCES OR CHANGES IN POSITION. DURING PHASE I THE IDF FORCES WOULD WITHDRAW BACK TO ISRAELI TERRITORY. PHASE II WOULD BE THE ACTUAL CEASEFIRE WHICH GAZIT ENVISAGED AS
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GOING INTO EFFECT ABOUT 12 HOURS AFTER PHASE I STARTED. WEIZMAN THOUGHT THIS IDEA HAD MERIT AND TOLD GAZIT HE WANTED HIM TO PRESENT THE CONCEPT TO THE CABINET DEFENSE COMMITTEE IN THE MORNING.

6. THE DEFENSE MINISTER OBSERVED THAT HE FOUND SEVERAL "GOOD POINTS" IN THE MESSAGE AND THAT HE WAS "NOT ENTIRELY UNHAPPY" WITH WHAT I HAD TOLD HIM. HE IS ENCOURAGED THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR PLO WITHDRAWAL BEYOND 10 KILOMETERS FROM THE BORDER. AND HE WAS BUOYED BY THE LEBANESE COMMITMENT TO TRY AND NEGOTIATE A FURTHER WITHDRAWAL OF THE PLO AT A LATER DATE. HE WAS ALSO RELIEVED BY NEWS THAT THE LEBANESE WERE PREPARED FOR DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS UNDER ILMAC AUSPICES IF A CEASE FIRE COULD BE ARRANGED. GAZIT COMPLAINED ABOUT THE LEBANESE INSISTENCE ON SECRECY. I SAID I THOUGHT IT IMPERATIVE THE TWO SIDES BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, EVEN IN A CAVE

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IF NECESSARY. WEIZMAN, WHO BY THIS TIME WAS BUSY
POURING SCOTCH, EMPHATICALLY AGREED.

7. I THEN BRACED WEIZMAN ON THE SERIOUS PROBLEM WE
FACED WITH THE CONGRESS AND THE PRESS OVER USE OF U.S.
SUPPLIED EQUIPMENT IN THIS OPERATION. I TOLD HIM I HAD
NO INSTRUCTIONS TO HIT HIM ANY HARDER ON THIS POINT THAN
UNDER SECRETARY HABIB HAD DINITZ, BUT THAT HE AND HIS
GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE
GRAVITY OF THE IMPLICATIONS. HE HESITANTLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT
THERE WERE U.S. ENGINES IN THE SHERMAN TANKS BEING USED
BY ISRAELI FORCES IN THE OPERATION AND THAT THE APCs
WERE OF U.S. ORIGIN. BUT OTHER THAN HOLDING HIS HEAD IN
HIS HANDS HE MADE NO EFFORT TO REBUT THE CHARGE.

8. WEIZMAN ENDED THE CONVERSATION ON AN OPTIMISTIC NOTE.
HE SAID HE WANTED WASHINGTON TO KNOW HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD
EACH POINT THAT HAD BEEN MADE, AND THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT
"SOMETHING CAN BE WORKED OUT IN THE NEXT 18 HOURS."

9. COMMENT: I AM GETTING GUN SHY ABOUT PREDICTING THE
COLOR OF THE NEXT RABBIT THE ISRAELIS WILL PULL OUT OF THE
HAT. BUT IF WEIZMAN WAS LEVELING TONIGHT (AND I HAVE NO
REASON TO BELIEVE OTHERWISE) I BELIEVE HE SEES THE SITUATION
CLEARLY. CONSEQUENTLY, I THINK WE ARE PROBABLY CLOSE TO
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GETTING THE IDF FORCE BACK ACROSS THE BORDER IF WEIZMAN
CAN PREVAIL TOMORROW MORNING IN JERUSALEM. BEYOND THAT,
I SHALL WAIT FOR WHAT THE MORROW BRINGS. A FINAL NOTE.
NOTHING IN ANYTHING SAID TONIGHT LEADS ME TO BELIEVE

THAT WEIZMAN, AT LEAST, IS CONSIDERING PULLING HADDAD'S MEN OUT OF TEL SHARIFA. EACH TIME THE SUBJECT WAS RAISED HE REVERTED TO HIS THEME THAT HAD THE OPERATION NOT TAKEN PLACE HE WAS CONVINCED THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN FORCES EFFORT IN SOUTH LEBANON WOULD HAVE COLLAPSED. THAT'S THE LINE AND HE SEEMS TO THINK HE IS STUCK WITH IT.

10. FYI: TO ASSIST WEIZMAN IN HIS PRESENTATION WITH THE CABINET DEFENSE COMMITTEE I AGREED TO MAKE AVAILABLE TO HIM AT THE AIRPORT TOMORROW MORNING THE TALKING POINTS CONTAINED IN PARA ONE OF REFTTEL PLUS PARA 4.

11. REQUEST DEPARTMENT REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS.
VIETS

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Message Attributes

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